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Right Mindfulness: Memory & Ardency on the Buddhist Path

An Abridged Edition

Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff)

Abridged for concise study. This condensation preserves the book's argument, structure, and key canonical passages in shortened form; it is not a substitute for the complete work.

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Abbreviations

AN – Aṅguttara Nikāya · Cv – Cullavagga · Dhp – Dhammapada · DN – Dīgha Nikāya · Iti – Itivuttaka · MN – Majjhima Nikāya · SN – Saṁyutta Nikāya · Sn – Sutta Nipāta · Thag – Theragāthā · Thig – Therīgāthā · Ud – Udāna

All sutta translations quoted here are Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu's, drawn from his complete translations in the original book.

Introduction

Much recent writing on mindfulness (*sati*) rests on two claims: that the Buddha meant by "mindfulness" a state of bare, non-reactive, non-judging attention to whatever arises at the six senses, and that cultivating this bare attention is, by itself, enough to end suffering. This book argues that both claims are seriously mistaken. Read against his own definitions, the Buddha's *sammā-sati* — right mindfulness — is not passive registering of the present. It is an active faculty of memory: the ability to keep in mind, and skillfully apply, lessons learned from the past. Ardency — the active effort to abandon what is unskillful and develop what is skillful — is built into the practice from the start.

The book unfolds in three parts. **Part One** (Chapters 1–4) lays out the Buddha's own definition of right mindfulness, its relationship to right view and right effort, and its close partnership with right concentration; it also examines why the modern "bare attention" model falls short. **Part Two** (Chapters 5–7) turns to MN 118, the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (breath-meditation discourse), reading its sixteen steps as a single, integrated practice that develops all four frames of reference of mindfulness. **Part Three** (Chapters 8–10) turns to DN 22, the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, drawing out the structure of ardency implicit in its instructions. Three appendices offer the full translations of MN 118 and DN 22, plus a discussion of why jhāna (meditative absorption) is indispensable to the path — countering the claim, common in modern accounts, that jhāna is optional.

Throughout, the guiding method is to let the earliest discourses interpret one another, rather than importing meanings from outside the Canon. Where the modern "bare attention" reading is quoted for contrast, the sources are deliberately left unnamed, since the aim is to address the interpretation, not particular authors.

PART ONE

Chapter One — Mindfulness the Gatekeeper

Sati, the Pāli word rendered "mindfulness," is cognate with the Sanskrit *smṛti*: remembrance, the act of calling to mind. The Buddha never defines the bare term, but he does define the *faculty* of sati, which is equivalent to right sati:

> "There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones… remembers & recollects what was done and said a long time ago. He remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, alert, & having sati — subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. [Likewise for feelings, mind, and mental qualities.] This is called the faculty of sati." — SN 48:10

This definition has two parts. The first sentence keeps the plain sense of *smṛti* — remembering things said and done long ago. The second part is the standard formula for the "establishing of mindfulness" (*sati* + *upaṭṭhāna* = *satipaṭṭhāna*): it names the task mindfulness is meant to keep in view. The two reinforce each other — mindfulness is applied in establishing itself, and the practice of establishing mindfulness strengthens the faculty of mindfulness, the way exercise strengthens a muscle (SN 48:11).

Remaining focused. The central task of satipaṭṭhāna is to stay focused on one of four topics — body, feelings, mind, or mental qualities — "in and of itself." The Pāli term for "remaining focused" (*anupassanā*) covers two kinds of practice: keeping watch over a topic as a steady frame of reference amid other experience, and watching for a particular quality (such as inconstancy) as it shows up in experience. The phrase "in and of itself" means that each topic is to be viewed on its own terms, not folded into some larger frame such as "the world" — an important restriction, since it keeps mindfulness from sliding into a diffuse, undirected awareness of everything at once.

Alertness and ardency. Two further qualities accompany sati in this task. *Alertness* (*sampajañña*) is clear knowledge of events in the body and mind as they happen — feelings, thoughts, and perceptions known as they arise, persist, and pass, and ordinary bodily activities (walking, eating, and so on) done with full awareness (SN 47:35; SN 36:7). *Ardency* (*ātappa*) is the desire to avoid what is unbeneficial — the resolve to abandon unskillful qualities and to give rise to and maintain skillful ones (SN 16:2). Ardency and its companion, compunction (*ottappa*, a healthy fear of wrongdoing), are indispensable: "A person without ardency, without compunction, is incapable of self-awakening" (Iti 34). Ardency is essentially the desire built into right effort itself — the drive to prevent, abandon, develop, and maintain, in line with what is skillful (SN 45:8). Because all things, skillful and unskillful alike, are rooted in desire (AN 10:58), the path is not something merely observed; it has to be willed into being.

Together, sati, alertness, and ardency mean that right mindfulness reaches in three directions of time at once: it draws on the past, applies clear knowing to the present, and works purposefully toward a future free of what is unskillful. (It was this active, purposeful sense of *sati* that T. W. Rhys Davids was reaching for when, translating DN 22 in the

nineteenth century, he coined the English word "mindfulness" — borrowing the phrasing of an Anglican prayer to be "ever mindful" of others' needs.)

A. Right View, Right Mindfulness, Right Effort

MN 117 shows how these three factors cooperate to develop each of the first five path factors as a support for right concentration. With right resolve, for instance: right view distinguishes wrong resolve from right; right effort works to abandon the wrong and enter the right; right mindfulness remembers to do so (MN 117). Right view itself has three parts: a framework (the four noble truths), a motivation for adopting that framework (freedom from suffering), and a set of duties the framework prescribes — stress is to be comprehended, its origin abandoned, its cessation realized, its path developed (SN 56:11). Right mindfulness's job is to keep all three — framework, motivation, and duty — in view and apply them to whatever is happening now. In this way mindfulness directs effort: it recalls the skillful/unskillful distinction, supplies the motivating desire, and reminds effort what to actually do.

B. The Governing Principle

The Buddha states that "all phenomena have mindfulness as their governing principle" (AN 10:58) — memory, rightly or wrongly applied, always frames experience and directs subsequent action. Several similes capture mindfulness's supervisory role. It is compared to a goad, prodding right effort back to its task (Sn 1:4). More fully, it is compared to the gatekeeper of a frontier fortress, who knows friend from stranger and lets in only those who belong, so protecting what is within (AN 7:63) — a simile that maps neatly onto mindfulness's three kinds of memory: motivation (why guard the fort), framework (recognizing friend from foe), and duty (admitting or excluding accordingly). It is also compared to a skilled cook who studies his master's tastes and adjusts the meal to please him (SN 47:8) — mindfulness likewise reads the state of one's own mind and adjusts practice accordingly, earning "a pleasant abiding here-and-now."

Two further similes warn what happens when mindfulness abandons its proper range for the "territory of others" — the five strings of sensual pleasure. A monkey that strays from safe ground onto a hunter's tar trap ends up snared by all four limbs and its mouth, helpless (SN 47:7). A quail that strays from its home ground of freshly plowed earth is easy prey for a hawk, but the same quail, taunting the hawk from within its own territory, causes the hawk to shatter its breast in the attempt (SN 47:6). "Wander … in what is your proper range, your own ancestral territory" — the four establishings of mindfulness — and Māra gains no opening.

C. Right Mindfulness & Right Concentration

Some modern accounts draw a sharp line between mindfulness (said to be broad and receptive) and concentration (said to be narrow and exclusive). The Canon does not support this. Mindfulness's range shifts as needed — narrow when defilements are strong and require urgent, focused attention, as when one's "turban is on fire" (AN 10:51 as echoed elsewhere) — but concentration, in the standard descriptions of the jhānas, is consistently the more expansive of the two, "permeating and pervading" the entire body

with rapture, pleasure, and finally a pure, bright awareness (MN 119). More importantly, the two interpenetrate rather than stand opposed. Sister Dhammadinnā defines concentration itself in terms of mindfulness: "Singleness of mind is concentration; the four establishings of mindfulness are its themes; the four right exertions are its requisites" (MN 44). AN 8:70 describes the establishing of mindfulness developed through all the stages that mark the four jhānas — with and without directed thought, with and without rapture, and so on — while MN 125 shows that dropping discursive thought about any of the four frames of reference is already the second jhāna. In other words, right mindfulness, developed fully, does not stop short of jhāna; it grows into it. This matters because the standard definition of right concentration in the eightfold path is unambiguously the four jhānas (DN 22; MN 141; SN 45:8), and claims that some lesser, non-absorbed concentration will do are not supported by a plain reading of the texts (see Appendix Three).

D. Mindfulness, Jhāna, & Release

The path doesn't stop at jhāna; jhāna provides a stable, refined foundation on which right view, right mindfulness, and right effort do their most subtle work — exposing the very process of intentional fabrication (*saṅkhāra*) by which the mind shapes experience, even within concentration itself. When this fabricating is finally seen through and dispassion arises toward it, fabrication ceases, and the mind is released (MN 140, describing the radiant equanimity of the fourth jhāna, which can be directed toward the formless attainments or simply allowed to lead to release). Right mindfulness continues to function even for arahants, who — though free of any need to attain — continue to rest in the four establishings, "disjoined" from their objects (SN 47:4). The Buddha himself is said to have most often dwelled in the concentration of mindfulness of in-and-out breathing, calling it a "Tathāgata dwelling" that, for arahants, yields "a pleasant abiding here-and-now" rather than any further ending of effluents, since theirs are already ended (SN 54:11). Right mindfulness is itself a fabricated quality, not identical to unbinding (Iti 90) — but it runs alongside a released mind as naturally as the Ganges merges with the Yamuna (DN 19).

Chapter Two — The Lessons of Fabrication

Three passages describe how the establishing of mindfulness is itself to be *developed*. First, SN 47:16 gives its prerequisites: well-purified virtue and straightened views. Right mindfulness can only be rightly established on a foundation of right view and ethical conduct — unvirtuous behavior breeds forgetfulness (you want to forget what you've done wrong) and clouds alertness, since a guilty conscience makes you reluctant to look closely at your own motives.

Second, SN 47:40 defines the *development* of the establishing of mindfulness as watching, in each of the four frames, the phenomenon of origination, of passing away, and of both together. This is not passive observation. The word for "origination" (*samudaya*) carries the sense of causation, not mere arising — so watching origination means actively testing what causes what, the way a scientist adjusts variables to isolate a cause. This is confirmed by the fact that the "development" of mindfulness is achieved by practicing the entire eightfold path, especially right concentration, which requires deliberately shaping states of mind — direct, hands-on experience in cause and effect.

Third, and most detailed, is the sixteen-step breath meditation of MN 118 (examined fully in Chapters Six and Seven). The steps run, in four groups of four, through the four frames of reference:

1. **Body:** discern long and short breathing; breathe sensitive to the whole body; breathe calming bodily fabrication.
2. **Feelings:** breathe sensitive to rapture; to pleasure; to mental fabrication; breathe calming mental fabrication.
3. **Mind:** breathe sensitive to the mind; gladdening it; steadying it; releasing it.
4. **Mental qualities:** breathe focusing on inconstancy; on dispassion; on cessation; on relinquishment. (MN 118)

What stands out is how proactive these steps are — each is a *training* ("I will breathe…"), aimed at a future state, not a bare report of the present. Bodily fabrication is the breath itself; verbal fabrication is directed thought and evaluation; mental fabrication is perception and feeling (MN 44) — and steps 4, 7, and 8 have you deliberately adjust these fabrications, while steps 10–12 actively steer the mind (gladdening it when low, steadying it when scattered, releasing it from what's unskillful), and steps 13–16 direct it, stage by stage, toward release.

The Buddha explicitly endorsed this proactive method over a more passive equanimity. When the monk Ariṭṭha described his breath meditation as simply resting in a mind already free of desire for past and future pleasures, the Buddha replied that this counted as mindfulness of breathing, but was not "brought in detail to its culmination" — and proceeded to teach the sixteen steps in full (SN 54:6). This active method also serves right concentration: it builds tranquility (steadying and unifying the mind) and insight (investigating fabrication) together, side by side, rather than one after the other. And it serves right effort, because — as MN 101 explains — some causes of stress dissolve through equanimous acceptance, but others require an active "fabrication of exertion" to counter them, and there is no way to know in advance which strategy a given case requires except by trying both and remembering what has worked.

This matters because even equanimity is a fabricated mental state, not a neutral resting point outside fabrication altogether. MN 137 distinguishes an ordinary equanimity toward sense objects ("multiplicity") from a more refined equanimity based on the formless concentration attainments ("singleness") — and even this refined equanimity, if relished and clung to, keeps the mind from total release (MN 106). The remedy, described in MN 137 and MN 113, is *non-fashioning* (*atammayatā*): not building any sense of self or possession even around the subtlest equanimity. As the Buddha put it to a devatā who asked how he crossed the flood: "without pushing forward, without staying in place" (SN 1:1) — neither straining forward into further fabrication nor settling passively into stillness. Ultimately "whatever isn't yours: let go of it" — form, feeling, perception, fabrications, consciousness alike (MN 22).

The upshot: developing right mindfulness through right concentration means gaining hands-on fluency in how experience is fabricated — bodily, verbally, mentally — and in when to counter a cause of stress actively and when simply to allow equanimity to do the

work, all the way up to letting go of equanimity itself. Why this hands-on knowledge of cause and effect matters so much is a question of right view — the subject of Chapter Three.

Chapter Three — Experience Is Purposeful

Dependent co-arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*) is the Buddha's fullest account of how suffering is caused and ended. One feature stands out for the practice of mindfulness: many of its factors — ignorance, fabrication, consciousness, name-and-form (which includes attention) — occur *prior to* contact at the senses (SN 12:2). Sensory experience, in other words, is never a blank slate passively receiving data. By the time contact happens, fabrication has already gone looking for it and shaped what will be found.

This means neither attention nor consciousness is ever "bare." In the untrained mind both are preconditioned by ignorance; on the path they are instead reconditioned by right view, aimed at ending suffering. Only at full awakening, when ignorance is entirely uprooted, does an experience of the unconditioned become possible — until then, attention and consciousness are inescapably purposeful. Nor is either identical with mindfulness: consciousness registers phenomena, attention selects what to focus on, and mindfulness remembers to keep that focus in place. But as attention is trained by right view it becomes *appropriate attention* (*yoniso manasikāra*) — itself a mode of remaining focused on mental qualities, closely allied with the fourth establishing of mindfulness.

Why can't bare, unfabricated awareness simply substitute for this whole apparatus? Because the unfabricated has no arising, no passing away, no discernible feature (AN 3:47) — nothing that could function as a tool. It cannot be reached directly, only arrived at by following a path, the way a path to a mountain doesn't cause the mountain but leads there. The path is itself a skillful fabrication, self-referential in a distinctive way: it uses fabrication to master fabrication, and ultimately turns its own tools — even mindfulness — toward relinquishment.

MN 2 illustrates the stakes. The untrained mind, lacking regard for the Dhamma, attends *inappropriately* — turning over unanswerable questions about self ("Was I in the past? Shall I be in the future?") — and from this inappropriate attention, views of self spring up as "a thicket of views, a wilderness of views… a fetter of views," binding one to further suffering. The well-taught disciple instead attends only to what is "fit for attention": whatever does not feed the effluents of sensuality, becoming, and ignorance, and whatever helps abandon them — above all, the four noble truths themselves (MN 2). This same appropriate attention extends to seeing the five clinging-aggregates as inconstant, stressful, and not-self (SN 22:122), and to starving the five hindrances while feeding the seven factors for awakening (see Chapter Nine).

Right concentration as a laboratory for fabrication. Developing jhāna gives direct, repeated experience of fabrication in five interlocking ways: (1) settling the mind requires becoming sensitive to how greed and distress are themselves fabricated, so they can be set aside; (2) the resulting state of absorption depends on consciously managed bodily fabrication (the breath), verbal fabrication (directed thought and evaluation), and mental

fabrication (perception, feeling); (3) the resulting pleasure gives a standard against which to measure — and find wanting — the pleasures produced by greed and distress; (4) the stability of concentration provides a still platform from which to observe even subtler movements of fabrication; and (5) as sensitivity sharpens, grosser fabrications are felt as stressful and let go in favor of calmer ones — carrying the mind, tier by tier, toward the cessation of perception and feeling itself (SN 36:11).

This same dynamic — sensitize, then calm — is the engine of the sixteen breath-meditation steps described in Chapter Two: each tetrad brings the meditator into contact with a layer of fabrication (bodily, then felt/mental, then the mind's own movements, then fabrication as such) and, having felt its effect, lets it grow still.

Guarding against complacency. Even a peaceful state of concentration can become a resting place rather than a passage forward — like a hand stuck to a resin-smeared branch, or a stagnant pool whose banks show no sign of breach (AN 4:178). To prevent this, right view, right effort, right mindfulness, and appropriate attention have to work together, applying directed thought and perception to develop dispassion for the very jhāna one is sitting in. AN 9:36 shows the pattern explicitly: settle into the first jhāna; then view its constituent aggregates as inconstant, stressful, and not-self; then incline the mind toward "the pacification of all fabrications… the ending of craving; dispassion; cessation; unbinding"; and finally, guard against fresh passion arising even for that deathless peace. Right mindfulness supervises each stage — reminding the practitioner not to settle for the attainment, and not to grasp even at the prospect of its ending.

Only with full awakening, when the "three-round, twelve-permutation" knowledge of the four noble truths is complete — each truth known, its duty known to have been done, and known to have been done (SN 56:11) — does the mind drop every remaining agenda. Yet even then, an arahant continues to engage the six senses, feeling pleasure and pain "disjoined" from them, as a hide once cut free from the flesh beneath it remains, however draped, no longer joined to the body (MN 146). Appropriate attention persists for the arahant too, now without the motive of gaining anything further, simply because it yields "a pleasant abiding here-and-now" (SN 22:122).

The upshot: at no stage — not for the beginner, not for the meditator deep in jhāna, not even for the arahant — is experience ever purely receptive. Recognizing mindfulness and attention themselves as fabrications, rather than mistaking them for something unconditioned, is what finally allows the mind to set them down and open onto the unfabricated.

Chapter Four — The Burden of Bare Attention

The modern mindfulness movement typically defines mindfulness not as a function of memory but as present-moment attention: non-judgmental, non-interfering, "choiceless" awareness — a kind of mental mirror that simply reflects what is happening, without bias or agenda. This is a genuinely different picture from the one found in the Canon, and some modern writers who notice the gap try to close it by reinterpreting the Buddha's definition of the mindfulness faculty (SN 48:10) as somehow really pointing at bare attention rather

than memory — either treating memory as a background byproduct of attention, or supposing the Buddha reused an old word for "memory" to name a genuinely new practice of watchfulness. Neither explanation holds up: Pali already had perfectly good words for attention (*manasikāra*) and for watchful alertness (*sampajañña*); there was no need to repurpose the word for memory unless memory was in fact what was meant. And a purely receptive state of mind, on reflection, is not obviously capable of producing memory at all — remembering requires active engagement with what is to be recalled.

The deeper question is whether the modern reading, even if it departs from the Canon, might simply be an improvement. Examining it closely suggests otherwise. Proponents typically hold that ordinary perception begins with a brief, unbiased, "seed state" moment of pure receptivity before concepts and judgments are layered on — and that mindfulness practice consists of deliberately prolonging and strengthening that first, bare moment, giving it primacy as the ground of all subsequent, more accurate cognition. But this raises real difficulties. If mindfulness is truly non-interfering and non-judging, it is hard to see how it could still perform the very active, judgment-laden functions the tradition assigns it — restraining unskillful states, cultivating skillful ones, giving rise to concentration — without ceasing to be non-interfering. Some theorists try to escape this by treating mindfulness and equanimity as themselves *unfabricated* — a move the book's discussion of dependent co-arising in Chapter Three directly rules out, since it would erase the distinction between the path (which is fabricated) and the goal (which is not), making awakening incoherent. Others simply declare mindfulness mysterious, which explains nothing.

A related move treats mindfulness as providing a neutral, objective platform on which the other path factors do their work — in effect reassigning to "mindfulness" the job the Canon gives to alertness. This still leaves memory homeless: if mindfulness names only present-moment awareness, nothing in the formula accounts for remembering what to do, why, or how — even though, as one prominent present-moment-focused teacher has observed, mindfulness itself is "easy"; it's *remembering to be mindful* that's hard. Leaving that function unnamed does not make it unnecessary; it just leaves it unexamined. Some accounts try to have it both ways, defining mindfulness as both memory and bare, broad receptivity at once — but this only collapses three distinct canonical qualities (mindfulness, attention, alertness) into one blurred term, without resolving the original difficulty of whether a genuinely non-interfering awareness can coexist with purposeful activity, or whether such an awareness exists at all.

The canonical account avoids all of this. It doesn't need to posit an implausible purely receptive awareness; it points directly at the preconditioning role of memory, desire, and fabrication described in dependent co-arising, and puts that role to skillful use rather than pretending it away. It uses a precise vocabulary — mindfulness, alertness, ardency, attention — matched to distinct functions, which aids rather than obscures a fine-grained command of practice. And it stays faithful to the Buddha's own declared scope: not a general theory of objective awareness, but an account of stress and the way to end it (SN 22:86). Rather than searching for an impossible passivity, the Buddha took the mind's inherently purposeful nature and aimed it, deliberately, at a true and lasting end to suffering. For these reasons — conceptual and practical alike — the modern "bare

attention" reading is best set aside in favor of the Buddha's own account of what mindfulness is and does.

PART TWO

Chapter Five — Mindfulness of Reading

The two discourses that treat satipaṭṭhāna most fully are DN 22 (the *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*) and MN 118 (the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, on mindfulness of breathing). DN 22 gives the fuller account of the four establishings on their own terms but says little about how they fit into the rest of the path. MN 118 gives the more precise meditation instructions and shows explicitly how the four establishings lead, through the seven factors for awakening, to release. Part Two of this book takes up MN 118 first, for that larger context; Part Three then returns to DN 22.

Even together, though, the two suttas leave gaps: neither defines mindfulness outright; MN 118's sixteen steps need real unpacking, and it never says whether they are strictly sequential; DN 22 catalogs types of feeling and states of mind to notice but says little about what to actually do about them, and almost nothing about ardency. Filling these gaps means reading both suttas against the rest of the Canon, guided by five points already established:

1. Mindfulness is fundamentally the capacity to remember and hold something in mind; in the establishing of mindfulness, this is joined by alertness (noticing the present) and ardency (the desire to act skillfully on what is noticed).
2. Right mindfulness relates to the rest of the path in two complementary ways — as a factor supported by right effort and leading into right concentration, and as one of three factors (with right view and right effort) that together correct each wrong path-factor and establish its right counterpart. These two descriptions are not alternatives; the second is really an instance of the fourth frame of reference (mental qualities) within the first.
3. The establishing of mindfulness has a further stage — its "development" — in which one actively watches origination and passing away (i.e., causation) within each frame of reference, requiring the practice of the whole eightfold path, right concentration included.
4. Mindfulness's job does not stop at reaching jhāna; it continues to operate within concentration itself, and beyond it, all the way to release.
5. Full release requires "penetrating with discernment" — thoroughly understanding a state's fabricated nature to the point of dispassion — which matters more for liberation than any accompanying psychic experience ("touching with the body") a deep jhāna might occasion (AN 9:43–45).

How to read a Dhamma text. MN 95 describes the traditional sequence for approaching a teaching: seek out a person of integrity; grow to trust them; listen to and remember what

they teach; penetrate its meaning on its own terms; ponder it against what else you know, to see whether it truly agrees; and — once this reflection gives rise to genuine desire and willingness — compare your own conduct against the teaching and exert yourself to close the gap, until you have both a direct, bodily-felt realization and a discernment that has fully penetrated the truth. This sequence itself models the first three factors for awakening: mindfulness (remembering the teaching), analysis of qualities (penetrating and comparing it), and persistence (the willingness and exertion that follow).

The lesson for reading MN 118 and DN 22 is to treat them the same way: understand what each passage means on its own terms and how it connects to the rest of the Dhamma; let that understanding motivate a real comparison with one's own practice; and look, in the silences of these texts, for guidance from elsewhere in the Canon — particularly wherever they are vague about the duties of ardency, or about how mindfulness continues to function once concentration is attained. That is the approach taken in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Six — The Structure of Breath Meditation

MN 118's sixteen steps of breath meditation are the Canon's most precise meditation instructions — so central that they're the only meditation technique given anywhere in the Vinaya (the monastic discipline), and they recur throughout the Saṁyutta Nikāya's dedicated chapter on breathing, sometimes linked to the seven factors for awakening, sometimes to all nine levels of concentration attainment, sometimes — as in MN 118 itself — carried through to full release. This shows breath meditation is not merely preparatory; developed fully, it is the entire path.

Are the sixteen steps sequential? A natural first assumption, since they're numbered, is that they should be practiced strictly in order. But the third tetrad especially resists this: step 10 (gladdening the mind) seems to cover the same ground as steps 5–6 (sensitivity to rapture and pleasure); step 11 (steadying the mind) seems presupposed already by steps 4–8 (calming bodily and mental fabrication); step 12 (releasing the mind) looks like the goal of the entire fourth tetrad that follows it. MN 118 resolves the puzzle another way. It explains each tetrad's connection to its establishing of mindfulness in strikingly generic terms — the breath is "a body among bodies" for the first tetrad, attention to the breath is "a feeling among feelings" for the second, and so on — terms that don't single out any particular step. The implication is that all four tetrads describe the *same* single activity (breath meditation) viewed from four different angles, rather than four sequential stages. Just as a musician doesn't stop playing a piece to listen to how it sounds — the listening happens simultaneously with the playing — a meditator doesn't leave the breath to attend to feelings, mind, or mental qualities; attention simply shifts to a different aspect of the same ongoing practice.

The macro level: each tetrad maps the whole path of concentration. Read this way, each tetrad traces the full arc of right concentration from its own vantage point:

- *Body* (tetrad 1): the breath, as body, grows calmer and more refined through the four jhānas until in-and-out breathing itself stops in the fourth jhāna (SN 36:11).

- *Feelings* (tetrad 2): rapture (present through the second jhāna) and pleasure (present through the third) grow subtler through the formless attainments, until perception and feeling themselves cease in the ninth and final attainment.
- *Mind* (tetrad 3): gladdening begins with ordinary wholesome activities like generosity and virtue, deepens through the joy of the jhānas, and culminates in the joy of full awakening; steadying culminates in the imperturbability found from the fourth jhāna onward; releasing happens repeatedly and provisionally at each new stage, and totally at unbinding.
- *Mental qualities* (tetrad 4): inconstancy, dispassion, cessation, and relinquishment are first directed at whatever distraction threatens concentration, and later — once concentration is mastered — at the very fabrications that constitute concentration itself, right up through total unbinding.

(Even where verbal or bodily fabrication technically ceases at a certain jhāna, the mind still makes deliberate choices when shifting between attainments — brief moments where fabrication resumes and any of the sixteen steps can, in principle, still apply.)

The connection to the seven factors for awakening. MN 118 singles out how developing any of the four establishings gives rise, in sequence, to the seven factors for awakening: mindfulness, analysis of qualities (discernment), persistence, rapture, calm, concentration, and equanimity — each said to follow naturally from the one before it. This sequence recapitulates the interplay of right mindfulness, right view, and right effort from MN 117 (Chapter One), now with an explicit place for discernment. Applied to the first tetrad, for example: steps 1–2 (noting long/short breath) build basic mindfulness and alertness; step 3 (whole-body breath) adds ardency and a wider field of alertness, implicitly revealing how the breath affects bodily energy; step 4 (calming bodily fabrication) applies that understanding, inducing a rapture "not of the flesh" that carries the mind toward calm, concentration, and finally the equanimity of the fourth jhāna. The same pattern — sensitize through manipulation, then calm what's been understood — recurs, mutatis mutandis, in each tetrad.

The micro level. In practice, this means the four tetrads are inseparable tools you reach for as needed. When your concentration falters, step 9 (sensitivity to the mind) tells you *that* something is off; deciding what to do about it draws on whichever tetrad addresses the actual problem — feeding the mind a needed feeling (tetrad 2, often via tetrad 1's calming steps), or clearing away a distraction (tetrads 3 and 4). Far from a linear checklist, the sixteen steps are four simultaneous lenses on one unfolding practice.

From concentration to release. MN 118 goes on to describe how the seven factors for awakening, augmented by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, culminate in "letting go" — squarely the work of the fourth tetrad, now turned on concentration itself. MN 111 and MN 52 describe this pivotal move: within the first jhāna itself, a meditator can "ferret out" every quality present — directed thought, rapture, feeling, intention, and so on — watching each arise and vanish, until seeing plainly that "whatever is fabricated and willed is inconstant and subject to cessation." Recognizing jhāna as something *willed*, not some external or metaphysical reality, is what allows dispassion — and thus release — to occur. Because the mind's confinement was always its own act of clinging, the letting-go that

dissolves it is likewise the mind's own act. This is the sense of the standard image for unbinding (*nibbāna*, literally "unbinding" or a fire's "going out"): fire, in the physics of the time, clung to its fuel; released from that clinging, it simply went out (Iti 93) — the ancient image both for the mind's agitation and for the peace of its release.

In sum: the first three tetrads (body, feelings, mind) support the direct work of staying with the breath; the fourth (mental qualities) operates one step removed, first fending off distraction, then — once concentration is mastered — dissolving concentration's own fabricated basis. Together they offer, at every sitting, four angles on a single unfolding process of tranquility and insight developed side by side.

Chapter Seven — Fleshing Out the Four Tetrads

The sixteen steps are terse by design — meant as memory aids for a living tradition of teacher and student, not as a self-sufficient manual. To put them into practice, gaps have to be filled from three sources within the Canon (the tetrads illuminating one another; other discourses on the four frames of reference; other discourses offering subsidiary themes) and from three sources outside it (living teachers, personal experimentation, and — cautiously, since it diverges from the Canon on key points such as the "entire body" phrase — the later commentarial tradition).

Directing and not-directing the mind. SN 47:10 gives the Buddha's general troubleshooting instructions. When, focusing on any of the four frames, the mind grows "feverish," sluggish, or scattered, you *direct* it: call to mind an inspiring theme until delight, rapture, calm, pleasure, and concentration arise, then withdraw from that theme and settle, thought-free, into ease. When the mind is already settling well on its own — released from external preoccupation, not sluggish — you simply note this and let it develop, undirected, into whatever establishing of mindfulness is at hand. This is not a contrast between jhāna and mindfulness (a common but mistaken reading); the passage ends with an explicit exhortation to "practice jhāna." It parallels MN 101's observation (Chapter Two) that some causes of stress need active countering, others simply need to be watched with equanimity — the practitioner has to learn from experience which is called for.

The preamble and the meaning of "to the fore." MN 118 introduces the sixteen steps: sitting cross-legged, body erect, "establishing mindfulness *parimukhaṁ*." Though later commentary reads this literally as fixing attention on the nose-tip, the same phrase is used elsewhere for meditations that clearly require broad awareness (contemplating the whole body, the aggregates, or the four boundless attitudes) — so it more plausibly means simply bringing the chosen topic "to the fore" of awareness, not confining attention to one physical point.

First tetrad (body). Steps 1–2 (noting whether the breath is long or short) are pure observation, not yet adjustment. Steps 3–4 are explicit "trainings." Against the commentarial reading that "the entire body" in step 3 means only "the entire length of the breath," three considerations favor the plain sense — the *physical* body sensed from within: the commentarial reading makes step 3 redundant with 1–2; step 4 immediately calls the breath "bodily fabrication" without flagging any change of terminology, which the

Buddha does do elsewhere when he shifts senses; and the standard similes for the jhānas explicitly describe rapture, pleasure, and bright awareness filling the *whole body*. Step 3, then, means learning to sense — and gently adjust — how the breath affects the body's four volatile properties (water, fire, wind; MN 140), both to prepare for full-body absorption and to give step 4 (calming the breath) a nuanced touch: too heavy a hand starves the body of energy and produces the very "bodily fever" SN 47:10 warns against, while an energizing breath (inducing rapture first) keeps the calming from becoming stultifying.

Second tetrad (feelings). Rapture and pleasure (steps 5–6) are not indulgences; they are structural necessities. AN 5:176 notes that in seclusion and rapture, sensual pleasure and pain, and even the pain that can accompany skillful striving, are all temporarily absent. MN 14 makes the point sharper: clearly seeing the drawbacks of sensuality is not, by itself, enough to resist its pull — only a rapture and pleasure "apart from sensuality" gives discernment the strength to refuse temptation. Rapture (*pīti*, related to "drinking") is not itself a feeling but a quality of energy — felt as a fullness, sometimes as intense as a wave, sometimes gently pervasive — that some people find pleasant and others find overwhelming, depending on perception; this variability is itself a lesson in how perception shapes feeling (steps 7–8). Because rapture can become agitating, the third jhāna — where rapture fades but pleasure remains — is calmer than the second, which explains the sequence pleasure-after-rapture in the steps.

Steps 7–8 (sensitivity to mental fabrication — perception and feeling — then calming it) build directly on 5–6: once you can skillfully induce rapture and pleasure, you're positioned to notice how these, together with the perceptions that accompany them, shape the mind — and then to quiet that shaping.

Third tetrad (mind). Step 9 (sensitivity to the mind) is the diagnostic step — like a standing person watching a sitting one (AN 5:28) — needed both to know what adjustment the mind requires early on and, later, to observe the fabrications at work within concentration itself so as to find "the escape" (MN 111, Chapter Six). Steps 10–12 (gladdening, steadying, releasing) often overlap in practice — the same skillful breathing that gladdens can also steady and release — and can be pursued either by drawing on the other tetrads (e.g., using rapture and pleasure from steps 5–6, or dropping discursive thought about the breath to move from the first to the second jhāna per MN 125) or by turning to subsidiary themes recommended in SN 47:10.

Four groups of subsidiary themes stand out. (1) The five preparatory exercises of MN 62: the perceptions of inconstancy and not-self (treated below under the fourth tetrad); meditation "in tune with" the properties of earth, water, fire, wind, and space, which cultivates a patient non-reactivity to agreeable and disagreeable sensations — as the earth accepts what is thrown upon it without disgust — and thereby steadies and releases the mind; and meditation on the body's unattractiveness (below). (2) The four *brahmavihāras* — boundless goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity, radiated in all directions (SN 42:8) — which gladden and steady the mind and, as "awareness-releases," free it at least temporarily from ill will, harmfulness, resentment, and irritation respectively. Each attitude, developed alone, can lead only up to a particular jhāna (goodwill to the first, equanimity to the fourth); but the discourses are explicit that on their

own they cannot release the mind from ignorance — MN 97 shows the Buddha chastising Ven. Sāriputta for teaching them, without more, to a dying man who was thereby reborn only into a lesser heaven rather than attaining any of the noble paths. Combined with the seven factors for awakening, however, they can lead considerably further. (3) The six recollections (of the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, one's own virtue, generosity, and the devas) and mindfulness of death, which similarly gladden and settle a wavering mind. (4) Direct application of the sensitivity, gladdening, steadying, and releasing developed at each level of jhāna and the formless attainments in turn — recognizing, as AN 9:34 details level by level, that clinging to the perceptions specific to any attainment, however refined, is itself "an affliction," and that non-fashioning (MN 113) protects against the pride of comparing one's attainments to those of others.

Fourth tetrad (mental qualities). Steps 13–16 — inconstancy, dispassion, cessation, relinquishment — connect to the preliminary perceptions of MN 62 and, more fully, to the list of nine perceptions in AN 10:60: inconstancy and not-self (applied respectively to the five aggregates and the six sense media), the body's unattractiveness and its many drawbacks (a long catalogue of diseases and afflictions), the abandoning of arisen unskillful thoughts, dispassion and cessation ("This is peace, this is exquisite — the pacification of all fabrications…"), distaste for every "world," and revulsion at fabrication as such. Cultivated even before formal breath meditation begins, these perceptions serve as advance warning against mistaking any state of concentration — however blissful — for an end in itself, and against pride in one's attainments; cultivated throughout the practice, they let step 13 flow naturally into step 14: seeing fabrication as fueled by passion, one starves that fuel and the fabrication subsides (step 15), then must be let go of, including any pride in having let it go (step 16) — a pattern that mirrors the four duties of the noble truths themselves (comprehend stress, abandon its cause, realize cessation, develop and finally relinquish the path).

The whole fourth tetrad is epitomized by the simile of the raft (MN 22): a man crosses a dangerous stretch of water on a raft he has built from gathered branches, and having reached the far shore safely, does not carry the raft on his back out of gratitude, but simply leaves it behind. "I have taught the Dhamma compared to a raft," the Buddha says, "for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto." Even the path itself, fully used, is finally to be released.

PART THREE

Chapter Eight — A Slice of Mindfulness

The Buddha once told Sāriputta that four disciples, each living a full hundred years with perfect memory and discernment, could question him ceaselessly about the four establishings of mindfulness and never exhaust his answers before their own century-long lives ran out (MN 12). This is worth remembering when approaching DN 22, the longest

canonical discourse on mindfulness: its length can create the illusion that it is a complete, self-sufficient treatment of the topic.

A close reading, though, reveals a striking gap: DN 22 catalogues, in rich detail, *what* to notice under each of the four frames of reference, but says remarkably little about what to *do* with what's noticed — that is, about ardency. One reading treats this silence as itself instructive: simply watch categories of experience arise and pass, impersonally, without intervention. But this doesn't square with everything established so far — that mindfulness is memory in active service of a goal, that establishing mindfulness is inherently proactive, and that feelings and mind-states are themselves fabricated, not simply given. Nor does it fit certain passages within DN 22 itself, which *does* give explicit, effortful instructions in places — the deliberate trainings of breath-meditation steps 3–4, or the effortful contemplation of the body's unattractiveness (itself painful to sustain, per AN 4:163). Elsewhere in the discourse, categories carry duties only implicitly: feelings "not of the flesh" can be tasted only through the effort of jhāna practice; mind-states like "concentrated" or "released" likewise require right effort to attain; the five hindrances are plainly meant to be abandoned and the seven awakening factors brought to fruition, not merely observed.

The real explanation lies in how the discourse is built. The Buddha's usual method for a large talk was to make an opening statement and then answer only the questions he chose to raise from it — sometimes exhausting the statement, sometimes covering only part of it while the statement itself sketches the larger picture. DN 22 opens with the full satipaṭṭhāna formula — remaining focused on each of the four frames, "ardent, alert, and mindful, subduing greed and distress with reference to the world" — but then asks and answers only "How does one remain focused on the body [feelings, mind, mental qualities] in and of itself?" and, for mental qualities, the same question repeated with respect to the five hindrances, the five clinging-aggregates, the six sense media, the seven factors for awakening, and the four noble truths. Not one question addresses *how to be ardent*, or how to subdue greed and distress, or how ardency operates once mindfulness is developed further. DN 22, in other words, was never meant to be comprehensive. It is a catalogue of *frameworks* — what to keep in mind — deliberately silent on the *duties* those frameworks carry, duties the Buddha explained fully elsewhere and expected listeners to supply by cross-reference (exactly the method of "mindfulness of reading" from Chapter Five). The next two chapters take up that task: mapping DN 22's frameworks onto the rest of the Canon to recover the ardency the discourse itself leaves implicit.

Chapter Nine — A Structure for Ardency

DN 22 is built as a "wheel": every exercise under each of the four frames of reference is run through three distinct levels of practice.

1. **The establishing of mindfulness** — the basic formula: remaining focused, "ardent, alert, and mindful," subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. This level still uses concepts of "I" and "mine" ("I am breathing in… I am walking…").

2. **The development of the establishing of mindfulness** (Chapter Two) — watching origination, passing away, or both, with regard to the frame in question; the language here begins to drop personal pronouns.
3. **A further stage** in which mindfulness that "there is a body… there are feelings… there is mind… there are mental qualities" is maintained "to the extent of knowledge and remembrance" alone, and the mind remains "independent, unsustained by anything in the world" — a level that drops "I" and "mine" altogether. MN 102 shows this stage can lead directly to full release: even a practitioner who thinks "I am at peace, I am unbound" is shown by the Buddha to still be clinging — to a subtle fabrication — until non-fashioning is complete.

These three levels track the three levels of right view (mundane, transcendent, and the fully impersonal seeing of stress simply arising and ceasing, SN 12:15) — a progression toward ever less self-referential, ever more precisely targeted ardency. DN 22 also notes that any exercise can be practiced "internally," "externally" (either through psychic knowledge of others' bodies and minds, or — more practically — by inferring that what one experiences is universal, per AN 5:57, cultivating a sense of *saṁvega*, spiritual urgency, at the shared plight of all beings), or both. Most of DN 22, however, concerns only the first level, working through the four frames one by one.

A. Body

Six exercises fall under "body": the first four breath-meditation steps; noting the body's posture; alertness in all physical activity; anatomical analysis into thirty-one parts; analysis into the four physical properties; and contemplation of a corpse through nine stages of decay. Together MN 119 calls these "mindfulness immersed in the body."

Posture-awareness and continuous alertness (exercises 2–3) directly support right speech and right action — you can only restrain what you're aware of doing — and, since talking and falling asleep are the only ordinary activities that necessarily break the first jhāna (SN 36:11), practicing alertness throughout the day builds momentum for concentration and sharpens sensitivity to when the mind has and hasn't settled.

The unattractiveness of the body (exercise 4) is a "painful practice," prescribed particularly for those dominated by strong passion, aversion, or delusion (AN 4:162–163) — not to be avoided, but used with discretion and balanced against gentler practices; a group of monks who used it without such balance and fell into despair, even suicide, were redirected by the Buddha to breath meditation instead (SN 54:9), not because the theme itself was faulty but because it needs the right context. Contrary to a common misreading, both this "painful" and its "pleasant" counterpart still require full mastery of the jhānas and the concentration faculty to reach the ending of the effluents.

The contemplation of the four properties (exercise 5) can, per MN 28, develop far beyond mere anatomical analysis. Ven. Sāriputta shows how reflecting that even the vast external instances of a property (say, fire, which can consume whole cities and yet always eventually goes out for lack of fuel) are inconstant leads naturally to seeing one's own body — sustained by clinging — as no more "self" than the property itself. This same reflection

depersonalizes verbal or physical abuse: a painful feeling born of ear-contact is "dependent, not independent," and seeing its dependence lets the mind "leap up, grow confident, steadfast, and released" even under attack (recalling the simile of the saw, MN 21) — while failure to reach such equanimity itself produces a fruitful sense of urgency, "like a daughter-in-law on seeing her father-in-law." This shows contemplating the body directly cultivating states classed under the *feelings* frame — evidence that the four frames interpenetrate.

The nine-stage corpse contemplation (exercise 6) is a form of recollection of death, meant to induce dispassion for the body and its pleasures, and — as verses from the Theragāthā and Therīgāthā vividly attest — to spur urgency and effort in practice rather than mere resignation.

B. Feelings

DN 22 classes feelings as painful, pleasant, or neutral, each further split into "of the flesh" (connected with sensuality) and "not of the flesh" (connected with jhāna) — six categories, simply to be noted as they occur. Read in isolation, this could suggest pure passive registration. But dependent co-arising rules this out: feelings, per SN 22:79, are always fabricated "for the sake of" something; they don't simply arise and vanish of their own accord, and they have real causal consequences for what follows. Our ordinary mishandling of painful feeling — compounding physical pain with mental distress, the Buddha's image of the "second arrow" (SN 36:6) — and our habit of chasing sensual pleasure as the only available escape, are exactly the patterns mindfulness of feeling is meant to interrupt, by offering an alternative: the pleasure of jhāna, "not of the flesh."

Because feelings not of the flesh (the pleasure of the first three jhānas, the equanimity of the fourth) have to be actively induced, DN 22's mention of them is itself evidence that this frame of reference presupposes concentration practice, not bare observation. As for how to work with feelings skillfully: MN 101 gives the general rule — don't reject wholesome pleasure that helps the practice, but where a pleasant approach lets unskillful qualities grow, deliberately shift to a more demanding, effortful one (and ease off again if that becomes counterproductive, per the simile of the well-tuned lute, AN 6:55). Painful feeling "not of the flesh" — the ache of unmet longing for awakening ("O when will I enter what the noble ones now enter?", MN 44) — is not to be suppressed; it functions like tension in a bowstring, providing the force that drives effort forward, to be released only upon reaching the goal. Sister Dhammadinnā further explains (MN 44) that pleasant feeling harbors the obsession of passion, painful feeling the obsession of resistance, and neutral feeling the obsession of ignorance — but each obsession can be undercut precisely by cultivating the matching jhāna factor (the first jhāna's pleasure abandons passion; longing for the noble attainments abandons resistance; the fourth jhāna's equanimity abandons ignorance). MN 137 describes a parallel ladder from ordinary "house-based" grief and pleasure, through "renunciation-based" grief (yearning for the goal), to renunciation-based joy and finally renunciation-based equanimity — each replacing the last, until even that refined equanimity is itself let go through non-fashioning.

C. Mind

DN 22 lists eight paired mind-states to notice — passion/no passion, aversion/no aversion, delusion/no delusion, constricted/scattered (both unskillful extremes to be steered between), enlarged/unenlarged, surpassed/unsurpassed, concentrated/unconcentrated, released/unreleased. These are not mutually exclusive categories to log passively; other discourses make the active agenda explicit: SN 51:20 explains how desire itself, in developing concentration, must be kept from being either "overly sluggish" or "overly active," neither "inwardly constricted" nor "outwardly scattered." MN 2 exhorts destroying arisen unskillful thoughts outright — sensuality, ill will, harmfulness — the instant they're noticed. And AN 10:51 frames continual self-examination as urgent, using the same "turban on fire" image as its call to action: when unskillful states are found, "intense desire, effort, diligence" must be applied at once to abandon them; when skillful states are found, the duty is to refine them further.

D. Mental Qualities

Five frameworks fall here, each tied to a duty of the four noble truths: the five hindrances (to be abandoned, as a cause of stress), the five clinging-aggregates (to be comprehended, as the truth of stress itself), the six sense media and their associated fetters (also to be abandoned), the seven factors for awakening (to be developed, as the path), and the four noble truths themselves (the overarching framework).

The five hindrances — sensual desire, ill will, sloth-and-drowsiness, restlessness-and-anxiety, and uncertainty — are tracked through presence, absence, arising, abandoning, and non-recurrence, a formula usable from the earliest stages of concentration all the way to full awakening (uncertainty falls away at stream-entry; sensuality and ill will at non-return; restlessness only at arahantship). SN 46:51 identifies what "starves" each: contemplating unattractiveness starves sensual desire; the release of goodwill and compassion starves ill will; the potential for effort starves sloth; stillness of awareness starves restlessness; clarity about skillful and unskillful qualities starves uncertainty. The Buddha's detailed graduated advice to a drowsy Ven. MahāMoggallāna (AN 7:58) — from simply dropping the drowsy train of thought, through reciting memorized Dhamma, to physical measures, to finally getting up and walking — models exactly this kind of active, escalating intervention rather than passive tolerance.

The five clinging-aggregates (form, feeling, perception, fabrications, consciousness) are, per SN 22:79, best understood as *activities*, not static parts of a person — form "is afflicted," feeling "feels," perception "perceives," consciousness "cognizes," fabrications "fabricate." DN 22 directs attention to "such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance" — direct, present-tense observation of a causal process (spelled out in SN 22:5: delight in an aggregate is what fuels its "origination" as a source of clinging; the absence of that delight is its "disappearance"). Seeing the aggregates this way — inconstant, stressful, not-self, fabricated — breeds the same disenchantment that, per AN 9:36, can eventually be turned on concentration itself.

The six sense media generate not fetters between sense and object, but fetters of "desire-passion" that arise dependent on both — like the yoke joining, not either ox itself, that is

the true bond between them (SN 35:191). This framework fits the practice of sense restraint, best grounded, per several discourses, in mindfulness immersed in the body — the image of a man forced to carry a bowl of oil without spilling a drop past a distracting crowd, on pain of death (Chapter One), or of six different wild animals tied by a single rope, each pulling toward its own habitat until, exhausted, they submit to whichever is strongest — an image for how, lacking bodily mindfulness, the eye pulls toward pleasing forms and so on, unless something stronger holds them together.

The seven factors for awakening — mindfulness, analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, calm, concentration, equanimity — are, per SN 46:51, each "fed" by specific attention: well-purified virtue and view feed mindfulness; distinguishing skillful from unskillful feeds analysis of qualities; the potential for effort feeds persistence; and so on, in patterns that mirror, and sometimes directly overlap, the starving of the hindrances (feeding analysis of qualities is starving uncertainty; feeding persistence is starving sloth).

The four noble truths, treated at greatest length in DN 22, add one further tool: a detailed map of exactly where craving arises and can be abandoned — at each sense medium, at consciousness, contact, feeling, perception, intention, craving itself, directed thought, and evaluation. Because these are the very same factors Ven. Sāriputta observes at work within jhāna itself (MN 111), this list shows craving can be uprooted not only at the ordinary senses but at the subtle "sense" of concentration's own factors — the same insight embodied in the fourth tetrad of breath meditation, where inconstancy leads through dispassion to the relinquishing of the path itself.

E. Four in One

DN 22 never explicitly says how the four frames relate to one another in practice — consistent with its narrow, deliberately incomplete range of questions (Chapter Eight). Reading it alongside MN 118, though, suggests the same structure found in the breath-meditation tetrads applies here: (1) the body serves as the anchoring frame for the other three — feelings, mind states, and mental qualities can all be tracked *while* focused on the body, which provides a stable "post" (SN 35:206) against which their causal interplay becomes visible without getting swept into distraction; (2) the fourth frame (mental qualities) functions chiefly to keep unskillful states at bay, first with respect to the world outside one's concentration, and later with respect to the very state of concentration achieved; and (3) any of the four frames, pursued fully through all three levels of the "wheel," can bring the seven factors for awakening to completion and, through them — augmented by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation — lead all the way to clear knowing and total release.

In sum: DN 22's seeming silence about ardency is not a directive to do nothing. It is an invitation — deliberately built into the discourse's very structure — to bring everything learned elsewhere in the Canon (and summarized in this chapter) to bear in fleshing out exactly what ardent, purposeful engagement with each of the four frames of reference looks like.

Chapter Ten — Why

DN 22 opens and closes by naming why the practice matters, calling it *ekāyana magga* — "a path going one way only" — leading to "the purification of beings… the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation… the disappearance of pain and distress… the realization of unbinding." The closing statement adds urgency: developed properly, this practice yields either full awakening or non-return in as little as seven years — or, the text insists, in progressively shorter spans down to a mere seven days.

The phrase *ekāyana magga* was long mistranslated as "the only way," but MN 12's parallel similes make clear it means a path with no forks — one that, followed faithfully, leads inevitably to a single destination, the way a thirst-scorched traveler following such a path is bound to reach the cool lotus pond ahead. Right view and right mindfulness's job of keeping this motivation ("why") in view is itself an instance of what mindfulness does — which is why the Buddha frames the whole discourse with a reminder of the destination before ever detailing the route.

Why single out mindfulness this way, when the epithet is applied to no other path factor — not even the path as a whole? The likeliest answer lies in mindfulness's supervisory role, established from Chapter One onward: working with right view and right effort, it keeps every factor of the path — including right concentration itself — pointed unerringly toward its goal, reminding the practitioner at each step of the framework, the motivation, and the duty at hand. That steady, single-minded direction is what makes it, of all the path's factors, the one path "going one way only" — and it remains, even for those who have already arrived, a pleasant abiding in itself.

APPENDICES

The appendices below summarize the content and structure of the three appendices in the original book. Appendices One and Two there give Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu's complete translations of MN 118 and DN 22; because those translations are lengthy primary texts already excerpted at length in the chapters above, they are summarized here rather than reproduced in full. Readers who want the complete sutta translations should consult the original book or dhammatalks.org.

Appendix One — MN 118, the Ānāpānasati Sutta (paraphrase)

What follows walks through the discourse's content in paraphrase rather than exact translation. For the precise wording, see the original book or dhammatalks.org.

Setting. The Buddha is staying at Sāvatthī during the rains retreat, together with an unusually large gathering of senior disciples — Sāriputta, MahāMoggallāna, MahāKassapa, Ānanda, and others — who are busy teaching junior monks in small groups. On the full-moon night of the Pavāraṇā ceremony, the Buddha surveys the silent assembly and, pleased with their progress, announces he will extend his stay through the following month

so that even more monks from the countryside can come see him. When that month, too, culminates in a full-moon gathering, he praises the assembly at length: it contains arahants; non-returners due to be reborn in the Pure Abodes; once-returners; stream-enterers; and monks devoted to each of the major groupings of practice — the four establishings of mindfulness, the four right exertions, the four bases of power, the five faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors for awakening, the noble eightfold path — as well as monks devoted to the four boundless attitudes, to contemplating the body's unattractiveness, and to the perception of inconstancy. Singled out above all these is one further group: monks devoted to mindfulness of in-and-out breathing, which the Buddha now describes as being "of great fruit, of great benefit" — the practice that brings the four establishings of mindfulness to their culmination, which in turn bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination, which in turn bring clear knowing and release to their culmination.

A. The sixteen steps. The Buddha then gives the sixteen-step instruction reproduced in full in Chapter Two of this abridgment: a monk goes to a secluded place, sits cross-legged with body erect, and sets mindfulness "to the fore," breathing in and out with continuous awareness — noting whether the breath is long or short; training to breathe sensitive to the whole body, and to calm bodily fabrication; training to breathe sensitive to rapture, then to pleasure, then to mental fabrication, then to calm mental fabrication; training to breathe sensitive to the mind, then to gladden it, steady it, and release it; and finally training to breathe focusing on inconstancy, then dispassion, then cessation, then relinquishment.

B. Mapping onto the four establishings. The Buddha then explains — in the passage examined closely in Chapter Six — that each tetrad of four steps corresponds to one of the four establishings of mindfulness. The breath itself is called "a body among bodies," so the first tetrad (steps 1–4) constitutes remaining focused on the body. Attention to the breath is called "a feeling among feelings," so the second tetrad (steps 5–8) constitutes remaining focused on feelings — and the Buddha adds pointedly that mindfulness of breathing does not occur in one whose mindfulness has lapsed and who lacks alertness, tying the third tetrad (steps 9–12, on the mind) to remaining focused on the mind. The fourth tetrad (steps 13–16) is said to belong to one who, having seen with discernment the abandoning of greed and distress, "watches carefully with equanimity" — constituting remaining focused on mental qualities.

C. From the four establishings to the seven factors for awakening. The discourse then traces, one link at a time, how developing any of the four establishings gives rise to each of the seven factors for awakening in turn: steady, unlapsing mindfulness on the chosen frame arouses mindfulness as a factor for awakening; examining and analyzing what is held in mind with discernment arouses analysis of qualities; the resulting unflagging effort arouses persistence; unwavering persistence gives rise to a rapture "not of the flesh," arousing rapture; that rapture calms body and mind, arousing calm; bodily ease brings the mind to concentration, arousing concentration as a factor; and watching that concentrated mind carefully, with equanimity, arouses equanimity. Each factor, once aroused, is said to be "developed" until it reaches "the culmination of its development" — and the same seven-step sequence is said to apply equally, developed via feelings, mind, or mental qualities, not the body alone.

D. From the seven factors to release. Finally, the discourse explains that developing each of the seven factors for awakening "dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment" is what brings clear knowing and release to their own culmination — the terminal phrase used repeatedly throughout the book (see especially Chapter Six) to mark the point where fabricated qualities, including the path-factors themselves, are finally let go. The discourse closes, as is standard, with the monks expressing their gratified delight in the Buddha's words.

Appendix Two — DN 22, the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (paraphrase)

As with Appendix One, this is a paraphrase of the discourse's structure and content, not a verbatim translation.

Opening. Staying among the Kurus at a town called Kammāsadhamma, the Buddha declares the four establishings of mindfulness to be "a path going one way only" — leading to the purification of beings, the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, the disappearance of pain and distress, the attainment of the right method, and the realization of unbinding. He then poses, and answers in turn, the question of how a monk remains focused on each of the four frames.

A. Body. Six exercises are given. (1) *Breath meditation*: the same first tetrad found in MN 118 — long and short breathing noted, the whole body sensed, bodily fabrication calmed — illustrated by the simile of a skilled lathe-turner who knows, without needing to look, whether his current turn is long or short. (2) *Postures*: simply knowing "I am walking," "I am standing," "I am sitting," "I am lying down," whatever the body's actual disposition. (3) *Full alertness*: bringing clear awareness to every ordinary activity — walking forward or turning around, looking ahead or aside, bending or extending a limb, wearing robes and carrying the alms bowl, eating and drinking, urinating and defecating, walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking, talking, staying silent. (4) *Anatomical parts*: mentally reviewing the body, from the soles of the feet to the crown of the head, as a collection of some thirty-one parts — hair, nails, teeth, skin, muscle, bones, organs, and bodily fluids — illustrated by the image of a man pouring out a bag of mixed grains (wheat, rice, beans, sesame) and naming each kind as he sees it. (5) *The four properties*: viewing the body, however it is positioned, simply in terms of the earth, water, fire, and wind properties present in it — illustrated by a butcher who, having slaughtered a cow, sits at a crossroads methodically cutting it into recognizable cuts of meat. (6) *The nine cemetery contemplations*: applying to one's own body, in nine successive stages, the reflection "this body, too, is of the same nature, has not gone beyond this fate" — modeled on the decay of a corpse observed one, two, or three days after death (bloated, discolored, festering); then eaten by animals and birds; then reduced to a fleshless, blood-smeared skeleton still held together by tendons; then a bare skeleton without flesh or blood; then bones scattered in all directions; then bones bleached white; then bones piled and more than a year old; and finally bones decomposed into powder. After every one of these six exercises, the discourse repeats the same refrain: the practice can be carried out with attention turned inward (on one's own body), outward (toward others), or both; can be developed further by watching the body's origination, its passing away, or both together; and can finally be sustained as

the bare, impersonal knowledge "there is a body," independent and unsupported by anything one might cling to in the world.

B. Feelings. A monk simply discerns each feeling as it occurs: painful, pleasant, or neither painful nor pleasant — and further, whether each of these is "of the flesh" (bound up with sensuality) or "not of the flesh" (arising from renunciation or jhāna), yielding six categories in total. The same threefold refrain (internal/external/both; origination/passing away/both; bare, unsupported knowledge that "there are feelings") closes the section.

C. Mind. A monk discerns the presence or absence of eight paired qualities in the mind: passion, aversion, and delusion (or their absence); a constricted or a scattered mind; an enlarged mind or one not enlarged; a surpassed mind or one unsurpassed; a concentrated mind or one not concentrated; a released mind or one not released. The same closing refrain applies.

D. Mental qualities. Five frameworks are treated at length. (1) *The five hindrances* — sensual desire, ill will, sloth-and-drowsiness, restlessness-and-anxiety, and uncertainty — each tracked through the same fivefold pattern: is it present, is it absent, how does it arise when unarisen, how is it abandoned once arisen, and how is its future non-arising secured. (2) *The five clinging-aggregates* — form, feeling, perception, fabrications, and consciousness — each simply discerned for what it is, along with its origination and its disappearance. (3) *The six internal and external sense media* — eye and forms, ear and sounds, and so on through the mind and mental objects — tracked for the fetter that arises dependent on each pair, how that fetter arises, how it is abandoned, and how its future non-arising is secured. (4) *The seven factors for awakening* — mindfulness, analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, calm, concentration, equanimity — each tracked for its presence or absence, its arising, and the completion of its development. (5) *The four noble truths*, treated in the greatest depth of all: stress is defined in the traditional formula (birth, aging, illness, death, association with the unloved, separation from the loved, not getting what one wants, and — in brief — the five clinging-aggregates themselves); its origination is defined as the craving that leads to renewed becoming, in its three forms (craving for sensuality, for becoming, and for non-becoming), and is traced in exhaustive detail through each point at which it can arise and take root — the six senses, consciousness, contact, feeling, perception, intention, craving itself, directed thought, and evaluation — each treated in turn as "where craving, when arising, arises, and where, when taking up residence, it takes up residence"; its cessation is defined as the complete fading and ending of that same craving, traced through the identical list of arising-points, now framed as exactly where it is to be abandoned; and the path to its cessation is defined as the noble eightfold path itself.

E. Closing. The discourse ends by repeating and expanding its opening promise: whoever develops the four establishings of mindfulness in just this way for seven years — or, the text insists, for progressively shorter periods, down to as little as seven days — can expect one of two results: full awakening in this very life, or, if some trace of clinging remains, the state of non-return. "This is the path going one way only," the discourse concludes, sealing the claim with which it began.

Appendix Three — Jhāna & Right Concentration (summary)

The book's third appendix takes up directly a claim central to the modern "bare attention" reading examined in Chapter Four: that mindfulness practice is fundamentally different from jhāna practice, that jhāna is not necessary for awakening, and that the modest concentration attained through bare-awareness practice already qualifies as right concentration. This runs against the standard formula, repeated throughout the Canon (SN 45:8; DN 22; MN 141), that defines right concentration as the four jhānas outright.

Before examining individual passages, the appendix notes a standard the Buddha himself provides for weighing such arguments: DN 29 lists the "wings to awakening" — including the eightfold path — as the measure against which any purported teaching must be checked; anything genuinely in conflict with that standard should be recognized as mistaken, whatever its source. This makes the whole search for exceptions self-defeating in principle: if a passage really did contradict the standard definition of right concentration, it would simply have to be set aside as inauthentic, not treated as evidence of an alternative path. As it turns out, though, none of the passages commonly cited actually requires this — properly read, none of them conflicts with jhāna as right concentration; what needs to be set aside is the modern interpretation forced onto them.

The appendix groups the arguments into three kinds and answers each:

I. Arguments from the traits of already-awakened people. (A) SN 12:70 describes arahants "released through discernment" who deny having attained the formless meditative attainments or psychic powers — read by some as proof they skipped jhāna entirely. But AN 9:43–45 defines "released through discernment" explicitly to include arahants who *have* mastered all four jhānas and the formless attainments; the term only excludes those who haven't additionally "touched with the body" subsidiary powers like clairvoyance. (B) A similar argument from Ven. Bāhiya's rapid awakening (Ud 1:10, "in the seen, only the seen…") overlooks that such compressed accounts often describe the culmination of long, unrecorded practice, and that other accounts of quick awakening (e.g., Ven. Ānanda on the night before the First Council) explicitly involve jhāna. (C) Some argue jhāna is required only for arahantship, not for the first stage of awakening (stream-entry), citing AN 3:87's description of the stream-enterer as only "moderately accomplished in concentration." But MN 117 and SN 55:5 both state plainly that right concentration belongs to the path to stream-entry; the "moderate" accomplishment described is a matter of a stream-enterer having attained but not yet mastered jhāna, paralleling their partial (but real) discernment of dependent co-arising.

II. Arguments for alternative definitions of right concentration. (A) DN 18 and MN 117 define "noble right concentration" as "singleness of mind equipped with" the other seven path factors, without explicitly mentioning jhāna — but this phrasing simply restates the opening clause of the standard jhāna formula itself ("quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities"), and MN 117's own definition of right resolve uses language drawn directly from the first jhāna's factors of directed thought and evaluation. (B) MN 149 describes insight into the six sense media leading directly to "right concentration" without spelling out the jhāna formula — but the passage explicitly says

this insight occurs "in tandem" with calm, and elsewhere (SN 35:96) the Buddha directly connects concentration with exactly this kind of insight into the six senses, indicating jhāna underlies the passage rather than replacing it. (C) AN 4:163's description of "painful practice" (via unattractiveness, revulsion, and inconstancy) omits the jhāna formula explicit in its "pleasant practice" counterpart — but the same passage states that *both* forms of practice depend on the five faculties, including the concentration faculty, which is elsewhere defined (SN 48:10) as precisely the four jhānas.

III. Arguments that redefine "right" in "right concentration." These attempt to read "right" as meaning merely "conducive to insight" rather than referring to the specific jhāna formula — a move the appendix shows has no support in how "right" functions for any of the path's other seven factors, each of which is given a specific, substantive definition rather than a merely functional one.

The appendix concludes that the textual evidence, examined case by case, consistently supports the traditional position: right concentration is the four jhānas; mastery of the jhānas is integral, not incidental, to the path; and right mindfulness — far from being a substitute for jhāna or something categorically apart from it — is one of its essential, working ingredients, exactly as Chapters One through Three of this book have argued from the start.

Glossary

Abhidhamma — The third division of the Pāli Canon, consisting of texts that systematize terms and categories drawn from the discourses.

Āmisa — Literally "flesh" or "bait": the pleasure, pain, or neutral feeling bound up with the pursuit of sensuality. Its opposite, *nirāmisa* ("not of the flesh"), describes the feelings that arise around jhāna and the pursuit of release.

Arahant — A "worthy one," free of mental defilement and no longer subject to further rebirth; the highest level of the Buddha's disciples, and a title for the Buddha himself.

Āsava (effluent) — Four qualities — sensuality, views, becoming, ignorance — that "flow out" of the mind and sustain the round of death and rebirth.

Brahmā — A deva inhabiting the higher heavenly realms of form or formlessness.

Brahmavihāra — Literally "brahmā-dwelling": the four boundless attitudes of goodwill, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity.

Deva (devatā) — A being on the subtle levels of sensuality, form, or formlessness, in terrestrial or heavenly realms.

Dhamma — Depending on context: an event or action; a phenomenon in itself; a mental quality; the Buddha's teaching; or nibbāna. Sanskrit: Dharma.

Iddhipāda (base of power) — One of four qualities — desire, persistence, intent, discrimination — each paired with concentration and effort, said to underlie meditative mastery.

Jhāna — Mental absorption; a state of strong, unified concentration.

Kamma (karma) — Intentional action, and the results that flow from it.

Khandha (aggregate) — The five components of experienced existence and the raw material for a sense of self: form, feeling, perception, fabrications, and consciousness. Sanskrit: Skandha.

Māra — The personification of temptation and every force, internal or external, that obstructs release.

Nibbāna (nirvāṇa) — The "unbinding" of the mind from passion, aversion, and delusion, and from the round of rebirth; the image is of a fire going out for lack of fuel, carrying connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace.

Saṁvega — A sense of dismay at the pointlessness of ordinary, unexamined suffering; a spur to practice.

Saṅgha — On the conventional level, the community of Buddhist monks and nuns; on the ideal level, any follower — lay or ordained — who has attained at least stream-entry.

Sutta (sūtra) — A discourse attributed to the Buddha or a senior disciple.

Tathāgata — Literally "one who has become authentic" or "truly gone": an epithet for the Buddha, and occasionally for his arahant disciples.

Upādāna (clinging) — Sustenance-seeking attachment to the five aggregates, taking four forms: to sensuality, to habits and practices, to views, and to theories of self.

Vinaya — The monastic discipline and its accompanying body of rules and tradition.